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PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION

Letter dated 8 August 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairperson of the fifty-fourth session of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

I have the honour to refer to paragraph 50 of the progress report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2002/25/Add.1) by Mr. David Weissbrodt, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of non-citizens, which relates to Singapore.

Mr. Weissbrodt reported that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) had expressed concern "that foreign domestic workers are prohibited from working during criminal proceedings against their employers, and that this forces such workers to leave Singapore without waiting to receive compensation from them". He also reported that CEDAW had noted that while male Singapore citizens could pass on their nationality to children born abroad, female citizens of Singapore could not. The Committee therefore urged the State party to "amend the nationality law so as to eliminate discrimination against women, and withdraw its reservation to article 9" of the Covenant.

On the issue of foreign domestic workers, Singapore takes a serious view of complaints by female domestic workers against their employers. Under the Singapore Penal Code, employers face enhanced penalties if they abuse or molest their female domestic workers. Upon receipt of such cases from the police, the Attorney-General's Chambers takes all reasonable

steps to carefully evaluate such cases and if there is sufficient evidence, to diligently prosecute the employers in court. The Singapore judiciary has strict time schedules, which do not allow for undue and unwarranted delay in the resolution of cases which have been initiated. Foreign domestic workers are allowed to seek employment for six months or longer depending on the recommendations of the investigating department or the courts, while they assist the authorities in investigations and during the court hearings under the Temporary Job Scheme. Under this Scheme, a work permit is granted to the worker who is required to remain in Singapore to assist in the case.

On the issue of citizenship, Singapore had clarified to CEDAW that both Singaporean men and women can pass on their nationality to children born abroad. Article 122 (1) of the Singapore Constitution allows for citizenship by descent to be granted to a child born overseas of a Singaporean father. The Singapore Constitution also provides a ready channel for children born abroad of Singaporean mothers to be citizens by registration.

I would like to request that this letter be circulated as an official document of the fifty-fourth session of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights under agenda item 5.

(Signed) Vanu GOPALA MENON
Ambassador
Permanent Representative